

United Airlines Comments to the Area Navigation and Miscellaneous Amendments  
NPRM  
Docket Number FAA-2002-14002, Notice 02-20  
July 2, 2003

United Airlines submits the following comments to the docket:

Regarding the change to FAR 121.99:

United Airlines is concerned over the proposal to add a definition of "rapid communications" based on a legal interpretation as opposed to operational considerations and experience. The 1977 legal interpretation does not consider the realities of international aircraft-to-dispatch communications. The data used to develop the 4-minute requirement is not applicable, and, therefore, is arbitrary and inappropriate. Our concern over this change is the ability to meet the four-minute requirement while operating in remote/oceanic regions where the primary communication media is HF voice.

The process used to exchange communications is complex and requires that initial contact be made through a communications service provider, (such as ARINC), who will then establish a voice connection between the aircraft and dispatch. This is a time consuming process. Additionally, the propagation characteristic of HF radio may also prevent the link from being established within the four-minute time frame. This is out of the control of the operator and, therefore, we should not be held responsible for meeting this criterion. We believe that this change is an unreasonable and unachievable objective.

Even with SATCOM-voice capability, there are regions of the world where the four-minute requirement may not be achievable. In addition, this puts an undue economic burden on the carriers to either fully equip with Satcom-voice capability, for those regions where coverage is possible, or invest in new technology that is currently not available.

It should also be noted that Controller Pilot Data Link Communications (CPDLC) are the primary communication media in many regions of the world. Aircraft-dispatcher data link communications are used extensively as the primary communication link. The use of datalink is consistently faster and more reliable than HF communications.

United and other international carriers have conducted Flag operations safely for many years using proven, reliable communication systems and procedures. We know of no compelling operational or safety reason to add this definition of rapid communications and recommend that it be removed from this NPRM.